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The Art of Discerning God's Call in Daily Life

Mark 14:32-36

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They went to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet not what I want, but what you want."

What strikes me about this passage is how much Jesus needed his friends, those who were part of the mission, those whom he had called to be a part of the great movement of the coming of the kingdom of God. Jesus had an awareness of the Father, I believe, because he was in prayer with the Father a great deal of the time. Through this intimate prayer relationship, Jesus "knew" what future was unfolding for him and, frankly, it gave him pause. It would give anyone pause. So, he sought comfort in the best place any of us can ever find comfort, in prayer, and for support, he asked his friends to join him. Get that - Jesus asked his friends to give him support.

Jesus was a very busy man. Yet here, and in many other passages, you see that he took time out to be in communion with the Father. You might easily conclude that the central focus of his life was his relation to the Father. He said that he could do nothing apart from the will of his Father, and that his entire ministry was all about doing the Father's will.

So we see two important things - Jesus asked his friends to support him as he prayed, and prayer was the central focus of his life. His ministry of bringing the kingdom of God, which took place through the dual emphases of preaching the Gospel and performing signs and wonders, was if anything an outgrowth of his prayer life with the Father. We see Jesus frequently departing from the crowds to be alone with God. He often retreats to a "quiet place" to pray, in this way becoming a role model for the disciples. When they looked at him, they longed to be like him, to have the same kind of intimacy with God that he had. That's why say said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). They knew he knew how to pray.

What sets Jesus apart from all the others is that sense of intimacy. He uses the word "abba", which is similar to our word "daddy." It denotes a closeness, a love, and a trusting relationship, much like the relationship Ben has to me. I am Ben's "Dai, Dai." Jesus goes to his Father, his "Dai, Dai", and prays prayers of faith and prayers of honesty and, to be accurate, prayers of regularity. He prayed regularly and he prayed often. The busier he got, the more he turned to God in prayer. Why? Because he knew God! He understood God as a loving Father whose main interest was to love, teach and heal his people. God was not only a God of compassion but a God of strength. So, Jesus turned to God to find the strength he would need to carry out his mission. As we should as well.

The art of discovering God's call for your life is like any skill. It takes some practice and some discipline. Yesterday I did some grout work in the bathroom. This was the first time I have ever worked with grout. I thought I had done a decent job when I finished, but this morning, looking at my work, I am now not so sure. It looked easy but it seems to me that there is some real skill in working with grout. It's the same with our relationship with God. It's an art, a skill that takes some effort to get good at.

I've noted the five Common Disciplines in your Sermon Notes. Please read them aloud with me:

1. **I will set aside time regularly for prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading and will seek to practice the presence of God.**

2. **By God's grace, I will strive mightily against sin, and will do deeds of love and mercy that lead to righteousness.**

3. **I will seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit, nurturing the fruit and experiencing the joy and power of the Spirit.**

4. **I will seek to serve others everywhere I can and will work for justice in all human relationships and social structures.**

5. **I will study the Scriptures regularly and share my faith with others as God leads.**

The Common Disciplines, as they are called, will help you get to the core of developing the art of discernment, and that essence of discernment is precisely this -- learning to listen to God. The hardest part of prayer isn't the words we use, but hearing. It is getting away from the busyness that occupies our time. It's not talking to God so we can listen when God speaks. Listening is at the very heart of prayer, and THE #1 Component of the intimacy Jesus had with the Father.

God speaks through rational means, like the listing of pros and cons, but God also speaks through our intuition and through our imagination. And God often speaks through our friends who have the Holy Spirit working within them. That's why Jesus brought his friends with him to pray, and that's why I very strongly recommend to you the practice of praying with others. As we bring others with us as we move to be intimate with the Father, we feel their support and their love and their desire to keep us on task with the call God places on our life.

So, commit to the Common Disciplines, and do as Jesus did - find some Christ-centered friends who will pray with you, and help you as you seek to discern the call of God in your life.

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